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Senate call for shake-up of U.S. intelligence

By NIGEL WADE in Washington

A COMPLETE shake-up of America's intelligence system was called for by the Senate's Intelligence Committee yesterday. "Urgent remedial action" was needed, it said.

Reforms recently proposed by President Ford were insufficient. The task was "no less important to safeguarding America's future than are intelligent activities themselves," the committee said in the first instalment of its four-part final report.

Among the points it made were:

Secret interference in other countries should be used only in the most extraordinary circumstances.

Laws had not been provided to ensure that intelligence agencies worked constitutionally.

Congress had not found a workable way to share benefits of secret information collated by the Executive.

'Agents deserve respect'

The committee makes nearly 200 recommendations after a 15-month investigation. It uncovered "abuses, excesses, and inefficiencies"—many cloaked by "unnecessary or unlawful" secrecy—but on the whole the various intelligence agencies had performed with dedication and distinction.

Individual Americans serving their country on "difficult and dangerous intelligence assignments" deserved respect and gratitude.

An effective American intelligence system was essential in face of a continuing challenge from "strong and potentially hostile powers." But Congress had not supervised the system properly.

Presidents had made "excessive, at times self-defeating" use of covert action until covert action became "a routine programme with a bureaucratic momentum of its own."

The cumulative effect of secret interference in other countries was "increasingly costly to America's interests and reputation," and the committee said that covert action should be used in future only "in the most extraordinary circumstances."

CIA warning

The Senate panel voted to delete from its report the overall annual budget figure for United States intelligence.

Mr George Bush, director of the Central Intelligence Agency warned the committee yesterday that disclosure of the figure could help Russia work out how the CIA operated.

The panel voted to let the full Senate decide later whether the overall figure for intelligence spending should be made public.

Senator John Tower, a conservative Texas Republican, refused to sign the report, saying that its recommendations for new laws and regulations "exceed the number and scope of documented abuses" and could weaken national security.

The committee said it was convinced competing demands of secrecy and constitutional government could be reconciled by a thorough overhaul of laws.

"Unlike the totally unified Russian KGB organisation," the report said, "the American intelligence service is fragmented and depends upon liaison to make operations more effective." Better accountability, co-ordination, and efficiency were needed.